



Canadian Antiquities

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY  
OF THE  
INTENDANT'S PALACE

ST. ROCH'S SUBURBS, QUEBEC.

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REVISED COPY

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BY

CHARLES WALKEM,

*Militia Department, late R. E. Staff in Canada.*

OCTOBER, 1880

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OTTAWA, 12th November 1876.

MY DEAR MR. WALKEM,—I am exceedingly obliged to you for all the trouble you have so kindly taken in collecting the information and plans relating to the Intendant's Palace at Quebec. I remember the old ruin well, and am well pleased to see what it was before it became a ruin. In its main features it resembles a good deal the old Government House at Montreal, though I do not think that the latter consists of more than one lofty story under the roof. If I am not mistaken, that story was bombproof. The letter published in the *Citizen* has been read with much interest. I return you the paper with a great many thanks.

Yours very truly,

WILLIAM F. COFFIN. \*

CHARLES WALKEM, Esq.  
Ottawa.

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\* Col. William F. Coffin, late Commissioner of Ordnance and Admiralty lands of the Department of the Interior, the refined scholar and gentleman. His grandfather John Coffin, Esq., merchant, was born and brought up in Boston, but resisted the revolution and was by name proscribed by an Act of the Massachusetts Legislature. Under these circumstances he arrived in Quebec about June 1775, and took an active part in its defence against Montgomery and Arnold at *Près-de-Ville*, *Sault-au-Matelot* and *Intendant's Palace* on the night of the 31st Dec. 1775.

Bearing upon the subject the following extract is given from Col. Allan Maclean's letter, 8th Regt., who commanded the Garrison of Quebec during the siege of 1775-6.

" Quebec, 28th July, 1776.

" Sir,

" As I am in a few days going to England with despatches from the Commander in Chief, I should be glad to know if I could be of any service to you &c., &c., but your conduct during the siege of Quebec last winter and spring makes it a duty &c., &c. To your resolution and watchfulness on the night of Dec. 31st 1775, in keeping the guard at the *Près-de-Ville* under arms waiting for the attack which you expected, the great coolness

" with which you allowed the rebels to approach, the spirit which your  
 " example kept up among the men, and the very critical instant in which  
 " you directed Capt. Barnsfare's fire against Montgomery and his troops—  
 " to those circumstances alone I do ascribe the repulse of the rebels from  
 " that important post where with their leaders they lost all heart."

Signed, ALLAN MACLEAN."

This letter is endorsed:

*84 (in Royal Emigrants)*

" From Col. Allan Maclean, 25th Regt. Commanding the Garrison at the  
 " Siege of Quebec, 1775-6, to John Coffin, Esq."

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## INTENDANT'S PALACE, RUINS OF, ETC. QUEBEC.

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It is the voice of years that are  
gone ! Thy roll before me with  
all their deeds !—OSSIAN.

The Centenary fête of the repulse of the American Rebels at Quebec in 1775-6 was celebrated in that time-honored old City on the 29th December 1875, under the auspices of the "Literary and Historical Society."

Among the most prominent topics of this celebration was that of the occupation of the "*Intendant's Palace*" in St Roch's Suburbs by the insurgent force under the leadership of the notorious Benedict Arnold, and its subsequent destruction by fire, and the guns from the ramparts of the *Upper Town* by order of the Governor General Sir Guy Carleton.

Neither the general description of the old fabric in the Centenary pamphlet, the photograph of its ruins, nor the fantastic sketches and views by authors and artists before its destruction, will convey any adequate idea of its extent or capacity, in length, breadth or height.

My present object therefore is to supply those deficiencies from an original plan and elevation of "*le vieux Palais*" laid down to a scale of 20 feet to an inch apparently for Military purposes about 1768-70, a few years only before its destruction in 1775-6.

The following is an extract from the Centenary pamphlet, viz :—"This once magnificent pile was erected under the French King's directions, and the means supplied by his munificence in 1684 under Intendant De Meulles. It was burned in 1712? (1713 correct) when occupied by Intendant Begon and restored by the French Government. It became from 1747? (1748 correct) to 1753 the luxurious resort (or rendez-vous) of Intendant Bigot and his wassailers. Under English rule it was neglected (the plan showed the building in good repair) and Arnold's riflemen having from the cupola annoyed Guy Carleton's soldiers orders were given to destroy it with the city guns."



"Skulking riflemen in St. Roch's watching behind walls to kill our sentries. Some of them fired from the cupola of the *Intendant's Palace*. We brought a nine-pounder to answer them." (*Extract from an Officer's journal, Quebec Garrison, 1775.*)

In addition to the foregoing from the Centenary pamphlet the following extract is submitted from an Officer's journal, viz :

"A party of the Garrison was afterwards ordered to sally out to St. Roch's which after bringing in a six-pounder brass field piece, with the small mortars, shells, &c, of the enemy's battery, set fire to almost the whole village of St. Rochs" beginning a little below Palace Gate, taking in McCord street, the *Intendant's Palace* and the whole of that neighbourhood, with several houses near the *Saut du Matelot*, which were all entirely consumed before next morning." (*Journal of an Officer at Siege of Quebec, 31st December 1775. Published by W. T. P. Short, 17th Regiment in 1824. Pages, 32, 33.*)

For those who may not be familiar with the high position of the "*Intendant*" and occupant of the "*Palais*," or of the nature of the duties appertaining to that important functionary, the following remarks are with much deference submitted from the most reliable sources.

His duties combined those of administration, direction, management, superintendence, &c., and next to that of Governor-General, the office of Intendant was considered as of the greatest importance and celebrity in Quebec.

It was first established by proclamation of the French King Louis the XIV in 1663, creating thereby a Supreme or Sovereign Council (*Conseil Supérieur*) for regulating the affairs of the Colony, which was composed of the Governor General, the Bishop, the Intendant, and four Councillors, with an Attorney General and Chief Clerk. The number of Councillors was afterwards increased to twelve. The authority of the Intendant, except in matters purely executive was indeed little inferior to that of the Governor General himself.

He had the superintendence of four Departments : of Justice, Police, Finance, and Marine.

The first Intendant named under the proclamation of 1663 was M. Robert who never came to Canada however to assume the duties of his office, and it was not until the summer of

1665, that Jean de Talon, the first *bona fide* Intendant, arrived at Quebec with the Marquis de Tracy, viceroy, and the famous Regiment of *Carignan*.

From the examination of old plans and documents, and also from information afforded by l'Abbé Tanguay of the Census Department, it would appear that the Sovereign Council first held their meetings in a very modest building on the south side of *la Rue de la Fabrique* (Fabrique Street) a little to the westward of the Jesuit's College, known at that time as "*the Treasury*."

During the incumbency of the Intendant M. de Meulles in 1684, that gentleman endowed at his own expense the eastern portion of St. Roch's Suburbs with an edifice known as "*le Palais*"—or "Intendant's Palace"—remarkable at that period for its magnificence, extent and general appearance. The endowment also included, as shewn by old records, about *ten* acres of land contained between the alignments of St. Roch's and St. Nicholas Streets to the River St. Charles in front, and in rear by the cliff on present line of St. Valier Street. This ground was laid out and embellished in walks, ornamental gardens &c.

In 1712 M. Begon, eighth Intendant, arrived at Quebec with a splendid equipage and retinue from France, taking up his abode in "*le Palais*," which, on the 5th January following in 1713 was unfortunately destroyed by fire, and such was the rapidity of the flames that the Intendant and his wife barely escaped with their lives. Madame Begon was obliged to break the panes of glass in her apartment before she had power to breathe. Two young ladies her attendants perished in the conflagration. The Intendant's valet, anxious to save some of his master's wardrobe, also perished in the attempt. His secretary, running barefooted for his life towards the river in front, was so badly frozen that he died a few days afterwards in the Hospital of the Hotel-Dieu. (*Vide* Notes 2e volume du *Dictionnaire Généalogique* par l'Abbé Tanguay.)

The Palace was afterwards rebuilt at the expense of His Majesty, under the direction of M. Begon; but whether exactly in the same style of the former building has never been ascertained. There can be no doubt, however, that the plan and elevation of "*le vieux Palais*" presented by the writer and published in the *Canadian Mechanic's Magazine* for October 1876, is a faithful illustration of that *re-built* under M. Begon and destroyed in 1775-6.



The principal entrance seems to have been from that side next the "cliff" "under the Arsenal," on the present line of St. Valier Street, flanked on either side by the King's stores, magazines, &c., and in rear of that stood a large building, known as the "Prison."

If, as described by "*la Potherie*" in 1693 the former building and accessories resembled a little town in itself, the same remark would seem to apply, and with additional force to the group rebuilt after the great fire of 1713—no less than about twenty in number—some of large capacity, are shewn on old plans drawn before and after the surrender of Quebec to Wolfe's Army in 1759.

According to drawings and sketches in perspective by a naval officer of the Fleet at the same period before Quebec (or about that time) and published 1761 in London, and from other sources, there can be little doubt for want of accommodation elsewhere that the old "*Palais*" was occupied by the troops of the Garrison under General Murray, after the battle of the Plains of Abraham on the 13th and surrender of the City to the victorious army on the 18th September, and continued to be used as Barracks for both officers and men until its destruction in the defence of Quebec against the American Rebels led by Montgomery and Arnold in 1775-6. This assumption is strengthened if not confirmed by the occupation in 1776 of the Jesuits' College as Barracks in place of the old "*Palais*." The amount of accommodation in the one building and premises would be nearly equal to that of the other—viz: a full regiment of Infantry—officers and men; hence the comfortable quarters in "*le Palais*" for the insurgent force under Benedict Arnold; room enough for the whole of his men!

In its general appearance, this once celebrated structure was more imposing from its extent than from any claim to ornate embellishments or architectural design. The style appears to be in keeping with the French domestic of that period;—two clear stories in height and a basement.

In length the extreme frontage was 260 feet with projecting wings of 20 feet at either end; the breadth from the wings to the rear line 75 feet, and the central breadth about 58 feet.

The entire height from the ground line to the apex of the roof was about 55 feet, and from the same to the eaves line about 33 feet.

In the basement along the whole front, there were no less than nine vaults, with a height of *ten feet* to the crown of the arch.

The apartments in the two stories were divided longitudinally by a wall from one end of the building to the other, comprising in all about 40 in number, out of which according to the plan more than half were set apart as barrack rooms for the troops, and most likely the whole *forty rooms* were occupied in a similar manner.

The entire roof was plain with a sharp pitch, and only broken by the pedimented wings at either end of the building, with chimney stacks and stone coping over the transverse walls; and further relieved in the centre by an octagonal cupola of two sections and a tapering spire. The approach in front was by two flights of steps through a porch, forming a conspicuous feature to the main entrance. The arched windows of the basement rose considerably above the site level, adding grace and beauty to the front.

The walls of the whole structure were built principally of the dark slaty rock peculiar to Quebec which is always subject, however, to more or less disintegration when exposed either to the influence of summer heat or the severity of a Canadian winter, as shewn to some extent in the present case, but only to some extent, judging from the appearance of material still remaining.

According to the usage of those days it is quite evident that much time and labour even to tediousness were spent in the erection of these walls, specimens of which may still be found elsewhere in Canada. The *modus operandi* was in building from the ground in dry masonry—a few feet at a time—generally about *two feet*, then grouted with a thin semifluid mortar, composed of quick lime and fine sand poured into the interstices or vacant spaces of the stone work, filling every cavity, excluding the air and left to dry and harden before commencing another course.

Some of the dressed stone of the quoins and angular courses are of the same kind as that quarried at Point-aux-Trembles, and the limestone quarries at Beauport.

The windows and door jambs were faced with a peculiar species of hard brick, one and a half inches in thickness of a dark flinty texture, combining in large proportions, silica and oxide of iron, and in appearance nothing the worse for the wear and tear of nearly two centuries. In size and

quality there is a strong resemblance to the old Flemish bricks, and no doubt they must have been imported for this object directly from France.

That portion of the "*Palais*" buildings used as the Royal "Store houses" facing the cliff immediately under "The Arsenal" were built of the same material, and as hard and compact as the walls of "*le Palais*" itself.

M. Boswell some years since while excavating the foundation of his brewery on the site of these store houses, came in contact with some of the old masonry and found it so firm and welded together that powder had to be used for blasting. The mortar was harder than concrete or stone itself, and the use of a drill in boring it, had but little effect. Portions of these old walls and masonry in the vaults of the brewery are still in good preservation. M. Boswell for many years past was the Lessee of the Ordnance or War Department for the site of the "*Palais*" ruins &c., he had them covered in generally with a temporary roof, and made other improvements at his own expense.

There was an old story current for many years among the inhabitants of the suburbs of the existence of *very deep* and extensive vaults beneath these ruins as well as subterranean passages, leading to the river northward, and in an opposite direction to the Upper Town.

It is more than probable that the remains of the old vaults and passages found in the excavations for the Brewery have been the origin of this story. In one case such a passage towards the River St. Charles would be flooded at high water, and in that to the Upper Town would be obstructed by a rampart of solid rock.

NOTE.—In the beginning of this article an extract is given from the *Centenary pamphlet* of the description of this once celebrated building, and now, further submit an extract from *Parkman's Old Regime in Canada*, page 273, these descriptions in some respects conflict with one another as well as with the *reliable sources* from which the information here given has been derived.

"The minister listened to the complaint of *Meules*, and adopted his suggestion, that the Government should buy the old Brewery of *Talon* a large structure of mingled timber and masonry on the banks of the St. Charles. It was at an easy distance from the *Chateau* passing the *Hôtel-Dieu* and descending the rock, one reached it by a walk of a few minutes. It was accordingly repaired, partly rebuilt and fitted up to serve the double purpose of a lodging for the Intendant and a Court house."

"Henceforth the transformed Brewery was known as the Palace of the Intendant, or the Palace of Justice, and here the Council and inferior Courts long continued to hold their Sessions." *Parkman's Old Regime in Canada*, page 273.

For nearly a hundred years after its destruction in 1775 the "*old Palais*" and accessories seem to have been in the



continued occupation of the *Garrison* and was known as the Commissariat, or "King's Wood Yard." A considerable portion of the land fronting on St. Valier and St. Nicholas Streets was formerly disposed of for building lots, and was further reduced in 1851 by the Imperial authorities waiving their claim to the "*Palais*" harbour in front, in favour of the City Corporation, to whom about the same time letters patent from the Crown were issued to the City Authorities.

From early records it has been ascertained that a *Main Guard* was formerly posted for duty in a building known as "*the Guard House*" on the opposite side of St. Nicholas Street, not only to protect the old "*Palais*" property, but to guard also and overlook the important Government works eastward of that street. This included the Royal Dock Yard, King's Wharf, magazines &c. together with a number of store buildings extending as far as "*La Canoterie*"—nearly opposite an old blockhouse in "Nunnery Bastion," on one side it was bounded by the foot of the cliff—now St. Charles Street, and by high water mark on the other side corresponding nearly with the present line of St. Paul Street.

The Dock Yard was protected eastward by a jetty of masonry nearly 100 yards in length on the beach of the River St. Charles, and *without* by a four gun battery—with another of two guns on the ramparts east of Palace Gate. While *inside*, the wharf or landing place was defended on both sides by heavy artillery, that on the west mounting about 12 guns, commanded and enfiladed the whole water front of the *Intendant's Palace*.

The ruins of "*le Palais*" and its accessories on various occasions since 1775 have been temporarily fitted up for the use of the garrison, such as stabling, washing and fodder sheds, military stores, quarters for Government employes, Commissariat fuel yard, &c., &c.

At a later period the vaults of the old "*Palais*" which still remained useful were leased by the Ordnance for storing ice, valuable wines and liquors, and other purposes to the owner of the adjoining brewery—Mr. Boswell and to the inhabitants of the City generally.

On these special occasions the Military authorities used to cover in the ruins with a temporary roofing of feather-edged boards or shingles. During the great fire of 28th May, 1845, in the St. Roch's Suburbs, several thousand cords of Government wood were piled in the fuel yard, better known as the

"King's Wood Yard," and in a *lean to shed* against the rear wall of "*le Palais*" some hundreds of tons of coal were stored, all of which were consumed, the coals burnt and smouldered for nearly six months, and in spite of the great solidity of the grouted masonry such was the intense heat, like that of a fiery furnace, that portions of the old wall, partly composed of limestone gave way, and left the remainder from the same cause in a very dilapidated condition.

On this occasion it was reported that an unfortunate woman and two children dwelling on the premises were burnt to death in the fuel yard.

Mr. Bailey, a Commissariat Officer, and M. Boswell owner of the adjoining brewery, made extraordinary efforts to save the lives of the victims; these gentlemen in earnest went through a fiery ordeal, and it was not until their coats had been literally burnt off their backs, and their hair burnt to a crisp, that at last they had to fly to save their own lives.

On the withdrawal of the Imperial troops from Canada in 1870-71, the venerable old ruins of the "*Palais*" and all the property attached were surrendered to the Dominion Government.

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